



KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Forming a family Kids, mom off to new start on Michigan Adoption Day

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"My name is Suzann Ready-McDonald, but it's going to be Suzann Rangel," the 8-year-old girl with the 100-watt smile tells a Kalamazoo County Probate Court judge on Tuesday before burying her head in her hands, overcome with shyness.

Judge Curtis J. Bell smiles and welcomes Suzann and her three siblings, Charles, 11; Nichole, 9; and James, 6, to court on this very special day -- Michigan Adoption Day. The four are getting new names and a new mom.

As the proceedings move forward, Kathy Rangel, of Kalamazoo Township, formally requests to adopt the siblings, "because I love these children to pieces, and we're a family."

Rangel's sister, Jackie Craft, seconds the motion. The children's Family & Children Services caseworker, Nancy Mitchell, supports the plan.

"I've been working with them since January, but they've been a family for a lot longer than that," Mitchell says.

Mitchell recounts to Bell and Michigan Supreme Court Justice Maura Corrigan that she helped Suzann write a name tag earlier. About her new last name, Mitchell recounts, Suzann had said, "You spell it R-Angel."

Adoption is about making "a forever family," Corrigan says. "That's what all this legal mumbo-jumbo is about: To make these children part of the forever 'R-Angel' family."

Suzann's smile grows even brighter as Corrigan announces the completion of the adoption. Nichole applauds, and the boys smile. Mom jumps up and kisses her kids, as friends, family and supporters in the back of the courtroom clap and take pictures.

The four new Rangels are among 21 children adopted Tuesday by 10 families in Kalamazoo County, officials say. Across the state, 36 counties took part in Adoption Day, with a total of 235 adoptions finalized.

Adoption Day was created as a way to raise awareness about adoption, the 4,400 children in Michigan awaiting adoption and the 19,000 in foster care, said Corrigan, who took part in adoption hearings in Wayne County on Tuesday morning before driving west for the afternoon's procedures. It's also meant as a way of dispelling myths surrounding adoption and promoting possibilities.

Promoted to Mom

The new reality for Rangel is that that she's been promoted. Before Tuesday, the kids called her "Aunt Kathy."

“Now we can call her Mom,” Suzann says.

Walking into J.C. Penney for a new family portrait after the adoption, Rangel, 49, beams as she says, “Here we are -- the family!”

For the first time since the kids were placed with her on Aug. 8, 2004, the holiday card they send out this season will be signed “The Rangels.”

The new family, which includes Rangel's youngest son, Bradley, 12, lives on Kalamazoo's east side. Rangel, 49, also has a grown son, Michael, living with his own family in New Mexico.

Asked how it felt to have a brand-new bunch of brothers and sisters, Bradley shrugs.

“It's not very different,” he says. “They've been with us for so long.”

Forming a new family

It wasn't in Rangel's plan to take on a new brood of kids.

Recently retired after 22 years in the Army, where she was a sergeant first class handling personnel, she moved with Bradley back to Kalamazoo, her hometown, where her mother and siblings live. She planned to work part time and travel.

But one of her sisters, the children's biological mother, developed a drug problem, was sent to prison and had her parental rights terminated.

Rangel became the children's foster parent.

“Thank God I have the means,” she says of being able to support the kids. “Thank God I retired. I bought a house; it was big enough for all of them. (I have) a van with built-in car seats. It's like everything is for a reason.

“Before the kids came, I talked to (Bradley) about the fact there would be a lot of changes. ... We asked, ‘What would God do?’”

Bringing them in

So the kids came home.

“They play so well together,” Rangel says of the group. “They do fight. It's just the brother-and-sister thing.”

There are adjustments. Frequently left on their own while their birth mother still had custody, the four siblings get counseling and are being assessed for psychological needs. They have tutors to help with their schoolwork.

“I'm going to have to deal with this for the rest of my life,” Rangel says of the trauma done to them. “I hate it for the kids. It's not fair.

“They're the sweetest kids. They're beautiful. But a lot of that stuff isn't going to go away.”

That's reality, though, and the former Army sergeant is nothing if not pragmatic. She and the kids will do what's necessary, believing God will provide.

“And he does,” she says.

While getting ready for the adoption hearing Tuesday morning, Rangel gave each child an identification

bracelet. Each bears the child's name and adoption date -- Nov. 21, 2006 -- the same date that has a big blue box drawn around it on the family calendar.

The bracelets signify family.

The kids, in turn, bought one for Rangel. They give it to her along with a handmade card.

Inside the card it reads: ``We love you very much, Mom. Thank you for adopting us." It's signed, ``All the kids."

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